

## **Closing Conference of the Project implemented by Republic Center for People with Intellectual Disabilities – PORAKA**

Tuesday, September 14, 12:00 a.m. Holiday Inn Skopje

### **Remarks by Public Affairs Officer Angela P. Aggeler**

Good afternoon, dobar den, miredita, thank you Dr. Vasilka Dimoska, and Honorable Mayors of Vinica, Kumanovo and Ohrid, for inviting me to be a part of this wonderful event today. The only thing more exciting that an opening event is its closing, when a proposal has turned from a great idea into a finished and successful project with a positive impact on all those affected.

As many of you know, each year the U.S. Embassy here in Skopje receives proposals from Non Governmental Organizations from around the country for a number of projects. These proposals focus on various topics from support for the development of independent and democratic institutions, to civic education, activism, volunteerism, conflict resolution, protection of the environment etc. I am proud to say that we are able to fund many of these each year and – hopefully – help promote the development of a stronger civil society here in Macedonia. We believe they are all important and that they all do good.

But this PORAKA project is special in many ways. It is said that a society is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable citizens, and our wonderful partners at PORAKA recognized that one of society's most vulnerable groups are persons with disability. Defining disability is difficult. It is complex and controversial. Whether from physical or intellectual impairment, disabilities have social implications as well as health implications. To understand them, one must recognize that they carry a powerful human rights dimension – they are frequently associated with social exclusion, and increased exposure and vulnerability to poverty. The formation of policies for any persons with a disability must be based on the concept of equal participation and social inclusion in a broader community life for all citizens. And existing human rights thinking offers five key principles for positive change: respect, choice, participation, independence, and local responsibility for persons with disabilities.

So today, you can say – through the difficult and important work of this critical project – that as a society you care for those among your most vulnerable members. I applaud your efforts and hope the successful completion of this project serves as an example to all of us, to be involved in our communities, to recognize those amongst us who need help, and to create a community of respect and hope for every member.

Thank you.